

# Virginia Range Horses

## FAQs

### *Frequently Asked Questions*

#### **Are the Virginia Range horses wild mustangs?**

Most wild horses in Nevada fall under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). However, the BLM declared the Virginia Range a “wild horse free area” through a land planning process in 1986.

As a result of this declaration, the Virginia Range horses have been designated as stray/feral livestock because they are not within a BLM herd management area. Horses that have migrated over time or have been “let go” onto the Virginia range fall under Nevada state laws pertaining to stray/feral livestock.

#### **What is stray/feral livestock?**

“Feral” refers to any formerly domesticated livestock which may have become wild and are running at large upon public or private lands with no physical signs of domestication. “Stray” refers to any domesticated livestock showing signs of domestication, running at large upon public or private land, whose owner is unknown.

#### **Why are there so many Virginia Range stray horses?**



Horse populations in the wild can quickly grow, doubling in size every few years. Based on the last official census (June 2014), there are more than 1,950 stray/feral horses on and around

the Virginia Range. The range was determined by a Range Inventory report by the Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Virginia Range Wildlife Protection Association in 2001 to support a population of 300-600 horses.

#### **Why are the horses sometimes considered public safety hazards?**

Four major highways border the range as well as a number of residential areas. In autumn and winter, as the forage and water diminish, stray horses come down off the range and move into urban areas searching for food and water. Horses near roadways and residential areas can cause car and pedestrian accidents. In recent years, the NDA has documented incidences where horses have kicked two girls, where horses have died from vehicle collisions, and three separate incidences when there were three human fatalities as a result of horse/vehicle collisions.

#### **Are there viable birth control methods that can be used to control expanding horse populations?**

At this time, no viable treatment has been identified that will effectively decrease free-roaming horse herd birth rates in a cost-effective manner. Research continues for a cost-efficient method of birth control for free-roaming horses.

#### **What exactly does “fence out” mean in Nevada?**

Simply put, if landowners do not want livestock on their property, they must construct a “legal fence” in accordance with NRS 569.431.

#### **Is there a management program for the horses?**

The Virginia Range feral/stray horse population can benefit from a proactive management program. Currently, the NDA is managing feral livestock to the best of its ability within existing legal and fiscal authorities, and within the cooperative agreement with Return to Freedom (RTF). The NDA’s efforts are focused on protecting public safety, such as removing horses in areas where public safety is of concern.

#### **Contact**

##### **HORSE HOTLINE**

☎ 775-353-3608

✉ [horse@agri.nv.gov](mailto:horse@agri.nv.gov)

Nevada Department of Agriculture

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## What happens to horses that are hit in accidents?

The NDA humanely euthanizes injured horses. Carcasses are removed from areas of concern for public safety reasons, with cooperating agencies depending on location, and when resources and equipment are available.

## Is it legal to feed the horses?

No. It is a violation of Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 569.040 to feed stray/feral horses. Despite the public's best intentions, feeding horses only draws them out of the range and brings them into urban areas. This poses a direct threat to public safety on roads and in neighborhoods. Additionally, like any other non-domesticated animal living in the wild, if there is not sufficient forage, feral livestock is expected to migrate to survive.

The NDA investigates feeding complaints, enforces the no-feeding statute with warning citations, and issues fines of up to \$2,000 and charges of a gross misdemeanor if feeding continues after warning citations have been issued.

## Can I supply them water?

Watering horses is legal under Nevada Revised Statutes; however, NDA recommends NOT watering horses in or near urban areas or major roads out of concern for public safety.

## When does the NDA trap and remove Virginia Range estray horses?

The NDA traps and removes horses when they are a public safety concern. Public safety concerns include livestock that are in residential areas and horses in close proximity to roadways. Since 2011, the only horses that have been trapped and transferred to the NDA's facility at the Northern Nevada Correctional Center are those considered threats to both public safety and to the horses themselves.

## What happens to the Virginia Range estray horses collected by NDA?

The NDA currently has a signed agreement with Return To Freedom (RTF), a non-profit group that has the option to adopt the horses. If RTF cannot place the horses, the horses may be sold per NRS 569.080 at a public livestock auction. Any member of the public may purchase the livestock.

## Are citizen tax dollars used to collect and remove Virginia Range estray horses?

No general fund money currently is allocated for the management of feral or estray livestock. It is fees paid by Nevada livestock producers that are supporting NDA's activities associated with the Virginia Range horses.

## I've heard that Virginia Range estray horses go to slaughter?

Since March of 2013 NDA has had an agreement with Return To Freedom (RTF), a non-profit horse advocacy group, for RTF to adopt out the horses.

If they do not get adopted, it is possible that the horses could end up for sale at public auction – at which the NDA has no authority to determine buying outcomes.

## What is the cooperative agreement with RTF for the management of the horses?

As of March of 2015, the NDA is in a cooperative agreement with RTF and other advocacy groups to help manage the Virginia Range horses. However, all concerns and complaints should still be directed to the NDA.

## Who can I contact about the horses?

The NDA maintains a horse hotline (775-353-3608) and an email contact: [horse@agri.nv.gov](mailto:horse@agri.nv.gov). Concerns are forwarded to our Agricultural Enforcement Officer for investigation.

## What can I do?

1. **Report illegal feeding.** Call 775-353-3608 with specific details – date, time, address or location, license plate numbers, and any identifying information.
2. **Fence out private property.** Because horses are attracted to green landscapes, sturdy fencing around such areas can be helpful to keep horses away from urban areas.
3. **Keep a safe distance from horses.** Horses can be unpredictable and can cause serious bodily injuries.
4. **Drive with extra caution** in areas where horses may be located.